

International Health

*Report of the 27th World Health Assembly of the World
Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland
May 7-24, 1974*

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THE 27TH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY of the World Health Organization was held in Geneva, Switzerland, May 7-24, 1974. Members of the United States delegation are as follows:

Chief Delegate:

Charles C. Edwards, MD, Assistant Secretary for Health, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Delegates:

Francis L. Dale, Ambassador, United States Representative to the European Office of the United Nations, Geneva.

S. Paul Ehrlich, Jr., MD, Director, Office of International Health, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Alternate Delegates:

Milo D. Leavitt, MD, Director, Fogarty International Center, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Francis W. Parnell, MD, of San Rafael, a Clinical Instructor, Department of Otolaryngology, University of California, San Francisco.

David J. Sencer, MD, Director, Center for Disease Control, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Atlanta, Georgia.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is composed of the World Health Assembly, the Executive Board and the Secretariat. The World Health Assembly, composed of 140 member nations, meets in regular annual sessions and determines the policy of the World Health Organization. In addition, it appoints and reviews the reports of the Director General and approves the annual program and budget.

The purpose and intent of the various United

States position papers was to provide comment on the various agenda items felt to be most important, and to provide constructive criticism and helpful direction to the Director General and the Secretariat of the WHO.

The most significant items of medical interest that came before the World Health Assembly included biomedical research, the long-term planning of international cooperation in cancer research, human health and the environment, immunization, and the various WHO programs including onchocerciasis (river blindness).

A significant portion of the United States position paper on biomedical research was devoted to the "brain-drain" problem, since qualified health researchers often seek other opportunities for productive employment of their skills especially in the developed countries. Also, attention was directed to the possible role of WHO in the evaluation of the use of human subjects for clinical experimentation. The United States co-sponsored a resolution reaffirming the importance of biomedical research in solving practical health problems of the economically developed and developing countries alike.

Another of the major items on the agenda was the long-term planning of international cooperation in cancer research. The Director General was requested to continue the work that has been started by WHO on a comprehensive program for international cooperation in cancer research and methods. The role of the International Agency for Research on Cancer in Lyon, France, was stressed in the United States position paper. The International Agency for Research on Cancer is the principal global agency for the coordination and implementation of cancer research in the fields of epidemiology, environmental carcinogenesis and related activities.

The United States co-sponsored a resolution drawing attention to dangers of biological pollution of the environment caused by lack of basic sanitary measures, particularly adequate water supply and waste disposal facilities. The resolution urged member states to make immediate and

long-term protection and promotion of human health the basis for their environmental policies.

Immunization campaigns were stressed in another United States co-sponsored resolution on the WHO expanded program on immunization. The Director General was requested to intensify activities pertaining to the development of immunization programs especially for the developing countries, as well as to continue support of research on the efficacy of vaccines. It is noted that in extensive regions of the world, immunization is still available for only a small portion of the children in the susceptible age groups.

The discussion of the onchocerciasis (river blindness) program was most interesting since it is estimated that among the 10 million inhabitants of the area of the Volta River basin in Africa, more than one million are infected with onchocerciasis and, of that million, at least 70,000 are considered economically blind and many more suffer visual impairment. This disease, carried by the black fly, constitutes the most important deterrent to human settlement and development of the fertile valleys of the Volta River basin which are now essentially uninhabited and nonproductive. Since there is still no drug suitable for mass chemotherapy, a massive multilateral aid program has been instituted and is scheduled to begin in November 1974. This is a 20-year effort to eliminate river blindness, and a resolution was adopted urging the countries that provide bilateral and multilateral aid through special health programs to consult with WHO for best coordination of effort.

It is necessary to stress the great relevance of the role of WHO to the practicing physician as it affects him in daily practice due to the increasing mobility of the patient population in the jet age. There are many examples of this relevance, including immunization, the possible global eradication of various diseases, especially smallpox, the epidemiologic aspects of cancer, and the global aspects of venereal disease.

Refer to: McMillan DE, Amacher P: Conference on the pathophysiology of diabetes mellitus (Notes from Important or Unusual Meetings). West J Med 121:350-355, Oct 1974

*Notes from Important
or Unusual Meetings*

Conference on the Pathophysiology of Diabetes Mellitus

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A WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE on diabetes mellitus was held at The Kroc Foundation in the Santa Ynez Valley of California, November 13-16, 1973. The purpose of the conference was to bring together some of the persons active in diabetes research in the western United States. Twenty-four investigators attended the conference and discussed papers given by 13 of them. In addition two brief presentations were made. This report summarizes the 15 presentations for those interested in current western diabetes research activities.

The first was by Peter H. Bennett, MD, acting chief of the Southwestern Field Studies Section, National Institute of Arthritis and Metabolic Diseases, Phoenix, Arizona. He brought up to date the information about continuing work on diabetes in Pima Indians. The Pimas have the highest prevalence of diabetes of any population in the world. Essentially half of all Pimas beyond middle age have diabetes as measured by glucose intolerance. Extensive observations have been made on the Pimas for this reason, and Dr. Bennett described the relation between serum insulin and glucose levels after a glucose load. The immunore-

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